



A postcolonial study of Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's children."

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.36676/urr.v12.i1.1457>

Published: 30/01/2025

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Abstract

Critics deal with *Midnight's Children* on the personal level of Saleem's journey of self-discovery, and/or as a mirror of the collective journey of Indian populations looking for self-realization after India's independence. Gorra, for instance, considers the novel "an attempt to preserve the spirit of India's secular and democratic independence a process that Saleem describes as the chutnification of history". "Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a sort of comic epic genre, a form which is a fusion of Homeric, mythic and tragic connotations". Reddy maintains, the novelist ingeniously weaves the personal story of Saleem and his growth into the story of India and her development" To Mark Mossman, "the novel is ... a book about social India. a book where the individual subjectivities of the characters are merged with, and are representational of, the various societal issues of the national culture". He also considers it "an argument for individuality, a book about a character who feels the split between the public and the private".

Kew words:- India, partition, midnight's, Public etc.

Introduction

Midnight's Children is concerned with the Individual and the Public as well as the micro and the macro. It also depicts the attempts of Indian populations towards figuring out their identity. Rushdie suspends the individual level to describe the public one and vice versa. The novel consists of two texts of Saleem and Aziz's journeys of self-discovery and their struggle towards self-realization. Each of these texts has to suspend its 'other to continue for the 'presence' of one depends on the "absence of the other. Hence, these texts are what Derrida would call centers' which substitute one another. They exist in a state of difference'. Derrida claims that "once the centre or the origin have begun repeating themselves, by redoubling themselves, the double did not only add itself to the simple. It divided it and supplemented it." Hence, "[t]here was immediately a double origin plus its repetition." He adds that "three is the first" and the "last" "figure of repetition" because "the abyss of representation always remains dominated by its rhythm, infinitely". To him, the figure "two" continues to be an "indispensable and useless articulator of the book". It is "the sacrificed mediator without which triplicity would not be, and without which meaning would not be ... different from itself; in play, at stake". The two texts inside *Midnight's Children* join together to form the third' or triple text of the novel. The narrator hints at the presence of this third' text with his idea of the "third principle". "Children are the vessels into which adults pour their poison If there is at hird principle, its name is childhood. But it dies; or rather, it is murdered". The two texts within the text of *Midnight's Children* leak into each other thus destabilising the binary first-text/second-text by removing the slash in between. This creates a twilight zone' in which a 'third' or a triple 'existence is born. The following section reveals the desire for erasing one's identity since labeling becomes indeed problematic





The novel's representation of Partition

Midnight's Children is the only novel in this thesis which deals with the major historical vents leading up to Partition in 1947, which led to the independence of India and the creation of Pakistan and later the subsequent independence of Bangladesh. The novel deals with major historical 1moments both pre- and post- Partition times. Indeed, Timothy Brennan notices how Midnight's Children is distinctive (...) in the way that it systematically sets out in a discursive fashion, all key historical road markers of the Indian post-war period inserting them into the narrative like newspaper reports or like textbook lessons in modern Indian history: the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar in 1919; the Partition of 1947: Nehru's First Five-Year Plan in 1956: Ayub Khan's coup in

Pakistan in 1958; the India -China war of 1962: the India- Pakistan war of 1965; the creation of Bangladesh in 1971: and the Indian "Emergency" of 1975. An effect of these elaborate historical moments in the novel is that the reader ties some of them to the aftermath of the 1947 Partition in the respective countries of Indi, Pakistan and Bangladesh, thus depicting the trauma and violence of Partition as ongoing, even after 1947. All of the characters in Rushdie's novel also move through and live in the three subsequent independent countries of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, which is a very innovative and multifaceted approach to literature dealing with Partition trauma. At the core of the novel is the precise moment of India's independence in 1947 that ties the characters to the history of the nation.

Midnight's children

Though Salman Rushdie's postcolonial novel Midnight's Children is generally perceived to be the narrative of Saleem Sinai, India's "twin," born at midnight on August 15, 1947, the women in Saleem's family become an opportunity to analyse different means of relating to Islam surrounding Partition. These women perpetually attempt to negotiate societal definitions of generation, gender, and Islam, as internal conceptions compete with external perceptions. No character is free of the implications of their history, both personal and familial. Each woman attempts to assert her individuality while simultaneously struggling against the chains of genealogy and the inherent components of categorical identity. While individuality becomes the ideal, it is impossible to achieve as "among the many selves that constitute one's identity, there exists a relationship of unevenness and asymmetry since each of these selves stems from a history that is transcendent of individual intentionality. Therefore, great- grandmother, grandmother, and sister (in relation to Saleem) illustrate the subjectivity of identity as it relates to religion and nationality. Yet, they simultaneously represent the impossibility of escaping the past. Thus, the difficulties with associating such arbitrary interpretations in the face of whole scale definition and division surrounding Partition emerge. The representation of Saleem's great grandmother marks the narratives' first depiction of a Muslim woman. She goes without a name, defined by her role as a mother, and by abstraction, gender. While this initial detail of namelessness is indicative of her patriarchal reality, her identity undergoes a massive shift when her husband suffers a stroke, rendering him incapable of performing the necessary duties to support his family. Familial and religious roles change nearly instantaneously as this mother, who had spent her life housebound in purdah, had suddenly found enormous strength and gone out to run the small gemstone business". When her son, Aadam, returns, he finds the seemingly immutable order of his family turned upside down, his mother going to work while his father sat hidden behind the veil which the stroke drooped over his brain". This role reversal serves as a commentary on certain inherent religious rituals, such as purdah. Rushdie seems to extol the "enormous strength" it takes for Aadam's mother to run the family business, emphasizing the power of economic liberation to release women from certain constraints. However, his condemnation of the "veil" and symbolic purdah that leaves Aadam's father without control





suggests a fierce opposition to traditional religious rituals. Ian Almond argues that "Rushdie seems to encapsulate every reservation he feels towards religion in general-and towards Islam in particular: faith as something essentially childlike and naive, a habit to be grown out of, a near-enough synonym for nationalism and capitalism" . Ironically, Aadam's mother can only "grow out" of this practice because of economics. However, Almond's view while occasionally accurate, fails to take into account the nuances of Rushdie's portrayal of Muslim women. There is strength, perhaps to Rushdie, in spite of faith, but he does not entirely condemn the women for their opinions. A tension among the old and new. modern and traditional, reaches the foreground of the narrative as Rushdie challenges Islam but does not entirely denounce its followers. The true conflict emerges, however. when Aadam's mother expresses her own discomfort with her changing visibility. She bemoans the fact that, "for so many years even [her] ankles were secret, and now [she] must be stared at by strange persons who are not even family members", While the tendency of a modern audience, reading this novel in 1981 or further in the future, may be to support Aadam's mother in her presumed liberation." this mindset fails to take into account her own feelings. Her way of life disappears in a moment, and her

Verbalized resistance suggests she endures a daily sense of violation. Thus, while purdah and the stringent guidelines accompanying it may seem like external modes of categorization preceding from organized religion to the individual, Aadam's mother suggests that in some cases physical representations of religious devotion can stem from the individual as well. According to Takim in the article entitled "The Islamic and Muslim View of Women," "the Hijab is viewed as a liberation for women, in that the covering brings about 'an aura of respect'". This statement counters the notion that Islam restricts women's freedoms or individuality because it shows hijab can be a choice. Her Violation from public eyes is the external judgment and modes of identification she cannot control when she is not allowed to observe purdah. When Aadam suggest she wear a burqa when working in the shop in order to alleviate some of the physical manifestations of her anxiety she replies, "Who would buy a turquoise from a woman hidden inside a black hood? It is a question of establishing trust. So they must look at me; and I must get pains and boils". Aadam's mother makes changes to her physical appearance in 11 order to hide her religion and help her family financially. She loses control over her identity because she cannot express her ideal representation of a Muslim woman. She possesses an acute awareness of her status as a Muslim woman and sacrifices her happiness to adhere to others' expectations rooted in bias. She demonstrates an understanding for the "public versus private, community versus the individual, centrality versus marginality, representation versus obscurity tensions that plague the modern nation". Thus, even prior to Partition, as a Muslim woman, she understands the limitations of her desires and must allow public perception override her expression of self.

Rushdie's depiction of nationalism In the second chapter, we analysed how in *The Shadow Lines* Amitav Gosh depicts two opposing forms of nationalism. On the one hand, there is Thamma's nationalism which is a mirror-image of the government's national narrative of nationalism which she accepts without questioning. On the other hand, we have Tridib's nationalism, who views artificial physical borders as a political construct, whose aim is to impose a difference "between oneself and one's image in the mirror". As such this distinction shows that the difference between the newly partitioned Subcontinent and between its various peoples is not innate but is imposed to fit nationalist agendas of the respective countries. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* takes Tridib's idea a step further and shows how nationalism is an artificial construct, mass-distributed through the national narrative of a country, and appropriated by the citizens of a nation as a means to belong.





Thus, Rushdie mocks the very idea of nationalism, while portraying its dangerous power, that is discriminatory in nature. He achieves this by having his characters move and live in the three countries of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Once Saleem and his family have moved to Pakistan.

Saleem's parents claim that: *"We must all become new people"; in the land of the pure, purity became our ideal. But Saleem was forever tainted with Bombayness, his head was full of all religions apart from Allah's (...)* I had lived in a country whose population of deities rivalled the numbers of its people" (Rushdie 431). This passage, while it shows the absurdity of physical borders, also depicts the vital need for humans to belong. Saleem's parents' determination to become new people is an effort and need to incorporate the nationalist discourse of Pakistan as a means to partake in Pakistani society. Saleem's dilemma is that of a great number of people who migrated to Pakistan or stayed there after Partition, who had to rethink their identity that was before largely based on syncretism. Thus, the migration to Pakistan for Saleem proves to be incredibly disorienting and difficult. shown by his statement how "I never forgave Karachi for not being Bombay"

Conclusion:-

I have explored Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* that has used magic realism in its unique way where they differ in terms of style and settings, that they belong to different magical realist traditions, and that the sources of their magical realism are not the same. Although it is true that Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* possesses magical power, he cannot be labeled as a magical realist device. Rushdie's English language magical realist writing combines both Latin American mythic tradition of magic realism and European surrealist tradition of magical realism. "His most characteristic form of magical realism is his 'magic realization of metaphor in which Rushdie interprets a metaphor literally that is then enacted in the narrative (Bowers 54), Magical realist writing is a perfect form of writing for a postcolonial immigrant, and a person with hybrid identity like Rushdie for its Contrasting viewpoint. From the study, I contend that magic realism reinterprets official or colonial version of history, gives voices to the oppressed, marginalized and disempowered, and allows them to tell their own stories from their own perspectives. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* emphasizes the political subjugation and different occurrences and issues of postcolonial Indian citizens, Magic realism also exposes the social, political and cultural problems of a society, nation, community or race, and most importantly, conveys a sense of alternative truth.

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